

Several options exist to help children cope

North Dakota State University Extension
Release

Parents and other adults play a significant role in helping children who are dealing with stress, said Sean Brotherson, North Dakota State University Extension family science specialist.

“They provide an example for children, act as a resource in helping children to cope, and give guidance and support in managing emotion,” Brotherson said.

The following are a variety of strategies that parents or other adults can use in helping children to deal with stress:

- Hold the child and provide physical comfort. Give children extra hugs, smiles and hand-holding. Set aside time just to sit next to your children, put your arm around them, or hold them on your lap and talk with them about their feelings.
- Give your child verbal reassurance. It is important for children to hear messages of support. Remember to tell them often that you love them, that everything will work out and that they are taken care of.
- Be honest with the child about your feelings. It helps children to know that parents may share some of their emotions. Answer your child’s questions in a simple, straightforward way.

Parents can help children by encouraging their expression of feelings and listening carefully to them. Ask them to tell you if they feel scared, angry or frustrated. Help them to realize such feelings are normal and that they can be worked out.

- Ask children for their ideas on how they might help with family needs.



Hugh C. McBride

Two German girls embrace after a ceremony outside Stuttgart’s Patch Barracks in remembrance of the victims of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States. Experts advise parents to play an active role in recognizing and dealing with security-related stress in children.

- Read books together that involve dealing with challenges. Buy, check out or borrow books that show children or families dealing with situations and overcoming them. Ask children what they think about the characters and how they respond. Compare to your own situation.
 - Use humor to lighten circumstances. Jokes, smiles and laughter relieve tension, especially for children.
 - Have children write or tell stories or draw pictures about their experiences.
- Children often express emotion and deal with stressful

situations through play or expressive behavior. Ask children to tell you a story about their fears or help them to write their feelings about it. Read it back to them and discuss it.

- Provide materials for dramatic play. Often children will gain a sense of control over difficult situations through dramatic play. Make available props or materials they can use to play the roles of firefighters, doctors, nurses, construction workers, safety personnel or other helpers.

Help to facilitate such play as appropriate and to give children feedback about what they express.

- Develop a plan with children for action to take in case of future problems or stress. Children feel empowered if they know beforehand what might be done to respond to a safety concern.

This may include a home evacuation drill, knowledge of contact information for safety experts or simply greater understanding of potential concerns.

- Practice emergency procedures so that children are familiar with them.
- Involve children in service activities. It can be helpful to give children something to do to respond to their stress.

Children benefit from feeling that they are making a contribution. Find an appropriate activity that children or youth can do to help contribute or assist with responding to the events that took place. Perhaps they can perform a service activity for others in need.

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